

11.

AN ORATION⁺,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHI-DELTA AND THALIAN SOCIETIES

OF

OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY, GEORGIA,

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1848,

BY

A. SYDNEY HARTRIDGE,

OF THE

SENIOR CLASS AND THALIAN SOCIETY.

MACON:
JOURNAL & MESSENGER PRINT.
.....
1848,

JSC
378.752
H2578

THALIAN HALL, JULY 5, 1848.

MR. A. S. HARTRIDGE:

Sir—In conformity with a resolution of the Thalian Society, we, the undersigned, have been appointed a committee to request for publication a copy of your chaste and eloquent Oration, delivered in the College Chapel, on the anniversary of the 4th inst. before the two Literary Societies of Oglethorpe University.

Hoping that you will comply with our request, we remain

Yours, respectfully,

ROBERT A. HOUSTON,
CLINTON WRIGHT,
LAFAYETTE S. QUARTERMAN, } Committee.

SCOTTSBORO' JULY 6, 1848.

TO MESSRS. ROBERT A. HOUSTON, CLINTON WRIGHT AND L. S. QUARTERMAN:

Gentlemen—Your kind communication of the 5th instant, requesting a copy of my Oration for publication, has been duly received. Not insensible to its many faults, yet confiding in the judgment of a just and generous public, who will overlook those blemishes in a youthful writer, which they would rightly condemn in one of "sagcr years," I accede to your flattering request.

I remain, as ever, yours, &c.

A. SYDNEY HARTRIDGE.

ORATION.

Gentlemen of the Phi-Delta and Thalian Societies:

UPON the wreck of Roman grandeur, "arrogating to herself a divine origin," dark, exclusive, sanguinary, arose "*the Church*." The light of human knowledge, which had once blazed forth from the land of the Greek and Roman, and reflected its brightness o'er each hill and vale—where the standard of the conquering legion was planted—now seemed forever extinguished. Man, who a few centuries before had filled crowded cities with the splendid monuments of God-like art, now bowed to the will of Tyranny, and *boasted* the chains of ignorance. Well might *then* the poet have exclaimed:

Alas! for Earth; for never shall we see
That brightness in her eye, she bore when Rome was free!

Darkness long curtained the temple of Science—ages rolled "slowly by," marked by no "monuments for time," save the story of bloody war and cruel wrong. But the light which shone from Calvary had beamed not in vain: its "soft radiance," ever the forerunner of knowledge and *happiness*, re-illumed a darkened world; and man sprung into a new, a far brighter and more glorious existence. It rekindled the pure flame upon the long forsaken altar, and the votaries of a pure religion became again the pillars of true philanthropy—the noble martyrs of stern, unyielding, lofty principle.

Such were our Pilgrim Fathers. Methinks we can yet behold that little band, as they bade an eternal farewell to the unfriendly land of their birth. Methinks we can yet behold that lonely vessel, the "*Mayflower*," as she careers over the unknown ocean—fraught with the prospects of a future State—driven in fury before the raging storm, and plunging madly over the wild billows. We may behold her, too, as she approaches her haven, and the eye of the Pilgrim Father becomes suffused with a tear, as gloomy fancy foreshadows a dark futurity for his loved children.

No titled nobility were among their ranks—no "craving governor" yearned to rule with iron sceptre, "the cheerless El Dorados of ice and snow." From the "dark portals of the Star-Chamber"—from the "cruel text of stern laws," came forth to them a commission more powerful than any which ever bore the impress of the "Royal Seal." Their own assemblies—their own blood—determined all—sealed all. As our fathers reared this vast and solid fabric, "unaided and uncared for," so it fell *not* when that *sympathy*, which was never *given*, was withdrawn, and the arm which never supported, was raised to destroy.

They came into a land where centuries had held their rule, with no pen to write their history; where the lofty oak had lived and died in "lingering age," unnoticed for its beauty—where many a noble stream had poured its useless waters, with no white sail upon its bosom—no

lovely village upon its blooming banks. They came—and, with no patronage save the prayer of far distant friends—no power, save the lofty determination of minds that knew not fear, turned back the course of ages. Yes! were their deeds enveloped in the mist of many ages—were they among the records of antiquity, the *scholar* would hail them as the most sublime among the noble achievements in the annals of this world. History would be

“Proud of such a treasure, and march with it down
To latest times: and Sculpture in her turn,
Give bond in stone and ever-during brass,
To guard them and immortalize her trust.”

The rock of Plymouth shall be the “*Thermopylæ* of the new world,” where a handful of noble spirits held combat—not with a mighty tide of human foes, but with the wintry storm—the ghastly pestilence—the sweeping famine, and the Indian tomahawk—held combat and *conquered*! And among that feeble few were the hidden fires which, years after, burst forth in a wonderful political convulsion and shook the fabrics of ages. It had its birth in the undying flame of devotion which animated their breasts; it had its birth, when amid “the howling winds and beasts,” the man of God repeated to his listening children the sad story of his wrongs. But time rolled on, and the land of poverty became the land of luxuriant harvests—the flourishing colony of a mighty nation. America calls for no voice of artificial rhetoric, no pompous antithesis, to rehearse the story of her glorious struggle, which so soon approached. ’Tis recorded where Time can never efface it.

When the “monster guilt” darkened with the cloud of woe the God-like countenance of man, and “fair creation” felt the curse of Heaven, the fiat of the Omnipotent went forth, that man should *die*. Century after century has rolled away; Philosophy has attempted to explain—Poetry has hallowed, and Eloquence has expatiated on—and all have proved the ephemeral nature of Humanity. But this unceasing progress of decay hath left untouched many lonely, yet sublime and glorious monuments, which have defied the hand of Time, and around which the devotees at the shrine of learning and virtue, ever and anon erect some fond memorials of their reverence. There have been the *great and good* who were not “born to die.”

GALILEO died as a man—yet Science shall ever hold in grateful remembrance the splendid votive gift he laid upon her altar; and ever twined shall be the memory of that scholar with the choicest offerings of genius. BACON died: yet mind received an impulse from his philosophy which shall forever prevent the shades of oblivion from gathering around the recollection of such intellect. And well may America be proud of those “burning and shining lights” which have sprung from her blessed soil. They too, now belong to fame. Illustrious shades! we meet upon this hallowed day to render a people’s tribute to the memory of you who were the defenders of a nation’s rights—to live o’er again the past—to wreath again in fancy’s dreams, the choicest flowers that adorn those reminiscences, which are the models of every noble statesman—the encouragement of every patriot—the admiration of every lover of liberty.

When the American contemplates that oppression whose loathsome head yet towers amid the splendid pageantries of European pomp and power—his imagination returns like the wearied dove, to luxuriate amid the blessings of his own happy home, and his soul responds to the words of an illustrious poet—“This heroic deed we owe to thee!”

When Ireland bent to her own Emerald's sward, bestows her blessing upon the adopted land of her children, she adds but another garland to those that already deck the fame of men who were willing and ready to become the martyrs of liberty.

The world in all her corruption has furnished many exalted, incorruptible minds. Cincinnatus yet stands forth upon the page of Roman History, a monument upon which is impressed in ever living characters, the motto of true greatness—"*fides incorrupta*." Wallace yet lives in the song of the Highlander, and wher'er the victim of tyranny utters her war-cry, some lofty and chivalrous spirits rally around her hallowed standard.

" Her path where'er the Goddess roves,
Glory pursues, and generous shame,
The unconquerable mind and freedom's holy flame !"

Yet the brightest examples of noble devotion, which deck the history of ages, veil their splendor before those monuments of magnanimous, disinterested, god-like greatness of soul which this day shall ever recall to the mind of the patriot scholar.

Though many live not in 'storied urn or marble bust,' yet, shall they never fade from the memory of their posterity—never fade till time shall obliterate the noblest characteristic of the American—'*Love of country*.'

The thoughts of them should fill every breast with pride and hope—*pride* for the true greatness his native land hath fostered—*hope*, that her future course may be as the brilliant Aurora of the North, to guide many a tempest-tost ship of State to a peaceful haven. 'Tis a thought ennobling, pure, imperishable, a thought that made, the poet exclaim :

" Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land."

It hath been truly said—"every age hath her great men to build up her temples. But where in the annals of the world can history point to the period, that has called forth so many wonderful monuments of burning zeal in a sacred cause, as those which mark the darkest pages of our country's short, yet eventful existence—so many like each of those upon whose tomb might have been inscribed—

" Like Cato firm, like Aristides, just,
Like Cincinnatus, nobly poor,
A dauntless soul erect, who smiled on Death."

But while we render homage to the illustrious of other days, we cannot pass by in silence here, the great apostle of liberty who "threw aside the trappings of pride and place to crusade for freedom in freedom's holy land." Truly and eloquently has one expressed the noble conduct of Marquis de Lafayette—"he came not in the day of successful rebellion, when the newly risen star of rebellion had burst the clouds of time, and careered to its place in the Heavens—he came when darkness curtained the hills, and the tempest was abroad in its anger, when the plough stood still in the field of promise, and the brier cumbered the garden of beauty—when the wife was binding up the gashed bosom of her husband, and the maiden was wiping the death damp from the brow of her lover, and when the pious began to doubt the favor of God."

The scorching rays of envy cannot blast—falsehood cannot destroy his fame, for it is identified with the history of him, who hath justly been pronounced the "greatest, noblest, purest of mankind."

But while grateful memory fondly cherishes the deeds of those noble spirits who have passed from earth, let us repeat that portentous question once proposed by a venerable patriot—"where shall the mighty consequences of the American revolution end?" The first fruits of that wonderful rebellion are well embodied in the words of the greatest Senator of his day.

"The great wheel of political revolution began to move in America. Here its rotation was guarded, safe and regular—transferred to another continent, from unfortunate, yet, natural causes, it received an irregular and violent impulse; it whirled along with fearful celerity, 'till like the chariot wheel in the race of antiquity, it fired from the rapidity of its motion and blazed onward, spreading conflagration and terror around." Those days have passed away, but to be renewed again and again, in the scene of revolution and change, as each beacon light of liberty bursts forth, and sends a fearful glare o'er the hills and vales of Europe. Each cry for freedom brings man nearer and yet nearer, to that glorious consummation, upon which every enlightened American and Statesman, gazes with fond anticipation—the employment of the fruits of knowledge, freedom and religion.

The shout of the warrior, that arose from the venerable plains of Greece, has found an echo in the scarcely explored region of the Cordilleras. May we not hope that the Russian serf at no far distant period shall point to our young Republic as the giver of happiness to the millions that surround him—may not a stream of Christianity yet emanate from the Empire of the West, to kindle anew the pure flame now almost extinguished by the dire power of ignorance, oppression and relentless superstition.

These are no idle dreams. Even now guided by the lamp of experience—that of the last half century, may we behold through the portals of futurity, the visions of the past and present, assuming the forms of stern reality. This is indeed "the age of change," Who, when he gazes through the eye of fancy, at that frail bark, fraught as she was with our Pilgrim fathers, the sport of the wide ocean wave, could realize the value of the freight she bore? Inclosed within her narrow sides, among that wandering few, were minds destined to lay the corner stone of a glorious edifice, which their posterity and the world should rear. It may yet lift its head beyond the lightnings of Heaven—not as the "tower of confusion," wherein a wicked world would impiously dare the power of the Omnipotent—but as the *Church of Christ*, the splendid monument of *universal peace*.

Free as the winds around us blow,
Free as the waves below us spread,
We rear a pile that long shall throw
Its shadows on their sacred bed.

There is one portion of that fair heritage, which hath been left for us and our children—beautiful beyond all others—it is a part of our land, around which truthful imagination throws her brightest halo. 'Tis the Valley of the Mississippi. There, fancy undisturbed may revel in her dream—she may re-clothe it with its thousands long since passed away—there may arise airy visions, of the splendor and magnificence, that once belonged to a people who now live only in tradition's song. There in the dark forest exist yet the few, the mouldering vestiges of their once imperial grandeur. How that people met their awful doom, time has never disclosed—'tis buried beneath Lethe's dark wave. It is one of those deep mysteries which the world in all her wisdom may never know—'tis an

ocean of doubt, upon which the ship, imagination, may wend her way fearless of wind and wave. It may be that some long smothered, volcanic fire at length will burst forth with convulsive throes, and submerge and shatter this vast and glorious area. It was a day indeed,

* * * "When God performed
Upon the trembling stage of his own work—
His dreadful part alone."

But between that wonderful period and the 19th century, time hath flung her darkest mantle—the savage re-peopled the forest and the plain. Civilization awed by the fast approaching night of superstition and barbarism winged her flight to the realms of Eastern monarchy. Thus the European found the Valley of the Mississippi—the fairest portion of the beautiful earth—millions may there reap the blessings of life. Even now, at distant intervals—

"Wide the wood recedes—
And towers shoot up, and fertile realms are tilled;
The land is full of harvest and green meads;
Streams numberless, that many a fountain feeds,
Shine disembowered, and give to sun and breeze
Their virgin waters—the full region leads
New colonies forth, that toward the western sea,
Spread like rapid flames amid the autumn trees."

There human power shall plant her standard on the high pinnacle. Science is even now rearing her temples there, and ere one short half-century shall have elapsed, art shall spread around upon the millions her brilliant monuments of utility and grandeur. There, shall the pure religion of the Son of Righteousness fling her glorious mantle o'er her sons and daughters. The son of the dark forest who now dreams in the distant wild of the sunny land, where once his fathers hunted, "unshackled and unconquered," will linger it may be, the last sad representative of his glorious tribe, upon the shores of that dark ocean, "whose upheaving waves" must so soon engulf him.

Thus well might the genius of Poetry exclaim,

"Who then shall place a limit,
To the giant's unchained strength?
Or curb his swiftness in the forward race?
For like the Comet's way through infinite space,
Stretches the long untrammelled path of light;
Into the depth of ages, we may trace
The brightning glory of his flight,
'Till the receding rays are lost to human sight."

Yes, America is destined to sway a mighty influence o'er the earth. The nation which sprung into existence upon that memorable day of '76, now towers amidst the empires of the world, the freest of the free. The sails of her "commerce now whiten every ocean, and glitter in every port." The fame of her institutions making the ocean her highway, is wafted by the winds of Heaven, wherever civilization appears. Her devotees at the shrine of painting and sculpture, now wander amid the palaces of the Cæsars, and emulate the "mighty master-pieces of antiquity,"—her philosophers have filled the mighty rivers with the inventions of genius; and eloquence hath reached the summit of sublimity, in the utterance of those few, simple, yet majestic words; "If Franklin brought the lightning from Heaven, Morse has made it speak." But, to rear around her an iron rampart whose base the waves of time shall ever impotently lash, knowledge must send her beams from

the sunrise State to the sunset Territory. The fell vulture, Disunion, may yet prey upon her torn and bleeding fragments, if education, does not "raise her standard amid the mighty assemblage of millions." Then let a bright flame be kindled in every darkened mind. Then may every American trace the blood-stained course of ignorance—then shall he see that while ill-boding anarchy desolates the garden spots of Europe, his own happy land is yet the "home of the free." Then shall he feel like the pilgrim of old, that knowledge is power and happiness, and peace, and Minerva points her wand to the only true temple of fame.

Imagination shall paint to him in her brightest colors, the lives of Franklin and Rittenhouse and Sherman. Truth shall show him how they sprung from the cradle of obscurity, to blaze forth as the beacon lights of the age—the objects of admiration to a grateful world. Ambition shall kindle within his breast her purest flame, and he will nobly aspire to *become* what they *have been*. He will clearly behold the dark clouds, whose fierce lightnings have shivered again and again the proudest temples of South America—over whose republics blighting despotism yet hovers, ready to seize her prey. Then will the American love the institutions of the noble dead, and revere them as an high and holy heritage. Faction will meet an eternal grave, and the bloody rites of Marf be forever forsaken; for no longer would the battle-field be the dread arena, where man would seek for the laurels of false glory—

"Glory! watchword of ruin—dread tocsin of slaughter!
Why should we hail thee as something divine?
Oceans of blood, shed as freely as water,
Nourish the laurels that conquerors twine:
On cities in ashes, which a nation is weeping,
Thou sitest enthroned, by the million adored;
While thousands of vassals thy harvests are reaping—
Their garner the Tomb, their sickle the Sword."

Then, indeed, shall our country become "the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night," for the world to follow in the march to civilization, refinement and religion. Nations shall behold the "deep, the unnatural gloom which envelops them;" and each patriot will echo the prayer of the Grecian combatant—

"Dispel this cloud, the light of Heaven restore—
Give me to *see*, and Ajax asks no more."

Then shall Columbia be like the towering Alp, around whose base the storm may rage in all her fury, but whose far distant summit is gilded with eternal sunshine. Then, in the words of her greatest statesman, "shall the American's object be his country—his whole country, and nothing but his country; and by the blessing of God, that country itself shall become a vast and splendid monument, not of *oppression and terror*, but of *wisdom*, of *peace*, and of *liberty*, upon which the world may gaze with admiration forever!"